

NEWS RELEASE

National Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.

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WASHINGTON, November 9: Marine Corps battle art, sketched and painted on Pacific battlefields from Guadalcanal to Okinawa, will be placed on exhibition at the National Gallery of Art tomorrow, to mark the 170th anniversary of the founding of the Marine Corps, it was announced today by David E. Finley, Director of the Gallery. The exhibition will continue through December 9.

Nearly 130 paintings, water colors, drawings, sketches and cartoons by 22 Marine combat artists are included in the exhibit. Also on display are sketches by a Japanese prisoner of war, depicting U. S. Marines in action. Another feature is a series of World War I drawings by the late Col. John W. Thomason, Jr., pioneer of Marine Corps battle art in the last war.

Many battle scenes of the Pacific campaigns are included among the pictures, which were selected from more than 4,000 works by 130 Marine artists. There are scenes of American planes attacking Japanese positions, Marine troops landing under fire, the charging of enemy emplacements, the flushing out of concrete pillboxes, and other phases of Pacific fighting. On the humorous side, there are pictures showing the antics of the goony bird, which amused Marines on Midway Island, and other lighter scenes.

The men who executed these pictures were official Marine Corps combat artists, whose primary job was fighting, and who suffered their share of battle casualties. In spare moments they sketched and painted under ponchos in tropical downpours, by the light of burning planes, behind the enemy's lines, and in water-filled fox-holes amid shrapnel from nearby bomb-bursts. They have caught, as no camera can, the grimness, the weariness, the humor and the paradoxical beauty of Pacific battle scenes, from the jungles of Guadalcanal to the hotly-contested beaches of Tarawa and Iwo Jima.

Among the artists represented in the exhibition is Corporal Paul R. Ellsworth, of DeKalb, Ill., who served as a tank driver, a map draughtsman and a camouflage expert, and was twice wounded in action.

Technical Sergeant Harry A. Jackson, of Pitchfork, Wyo., another twice-wounded combat artist, made drawings in what he called his "press club", which was anything from a bomb crater at Tarawa to a shell-demolished house in Saipan, or a rubble-littered building on Kwajalein.

Staff Sergeant John R. McDermott, of Glendale, Calif., was forced to make many of his sketches while lying on his stomach during the heavy fighting on Guam. "I got used to the idea that men get blown apart in war, that Marines were not immune to shot and shell and that a lot of nice kids got killed," he said.

Typical of the men who risked their lives to depict a combat scene was Staff Sergeant John Fabion, of Chicago, Ill., winner of several art prizes. Fabion depicts ruins of enemy concrete strongholds and battered Japanese pillboxes, wrecked Zeros and Bettys, and damage wrought by Marine planes on enemy emplacements.

Bombing, shelling, incessant rain and other such factors created a miserable life for all Marines in combat, but Master Technical Sergeant Victor P. Donahue, of Omaha, Neb., put an element of humor into his drawings. In the Cape Gloucester campaign, virtually all of his drawing paper was ruined by rain, and he was forced to make many of his final drawings on old, unexposed photographic printing paper.

First Lieutenant Herbert H. Laidman, of Grand Island, New York, portrays realistically the highly-trained, rigidly-disciplined Marine. Chronic malaria kept Lt. Laidman in the hospital for long stretches, but in spite of this, and the lack of materials, he managed to send back 60 watercolors and dozens of drawings.

Outstanding in the exhibition are representative works by Lieutenant Colonel Donald L. Dickson, of Chestnut Hills, Philadelphia, who served as a regimental adjutant on Guadalcanal. His regiment was the first to land on the island,

"I want to picture these men just as they are -- tired and dirty, rough, and sometimes scared, but with the best spirit in the world", he said. He sketched men as they got their orders to go out in the jungle on patrol, tense and alert. He caught their moods as they came back -- grim, worn out, dirty, perhaps with a bandage around a wrist or ankle, dragging on a cigarette. He drew them as they hugged the ground during a bombardment, as they peered across a protecting log to spot an enemy sniper, as they struggled across muddy streams loaded with gear, as they charged Japanese emplacements, and as they were carried back wounded.

Many of these Marine artists were well known before the war. Major George M. Harding, of Wynnewood, Pa., a professional artist, served on the faculties of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the School of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. A Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society of London, he has won several national art competitions .

Colonel Thomason, the fighter-artist and writer of the Marine Corps in World War I, has often been called the godfather of the Corps' present art program. He was a company commander in the Fifth Marines during that unit's engagements in 1918. Remaining in the Marine Corps after the war, Colonel Thomason, then a Captain, continued his hobby of drawing until his death in March, 1944.

Some of the Thomason drawings in the present exhibition were used as illustrations in his first book, "Fix Bayonets", published in 1924. Many of these drawings were done in France and Germany during World War I.

Marine Corps artists, ~~besides those mentioned~~, whose work will be exhibited, are as follows:

T/Sgt. Paul T. Arlt, Arlington, Va.; Lt. Kenneth Bald, Mt. Vernon, N. Y.; Lt. Col. Donald L. Dickson, Chestnut Hills, Philadelphia, Pa.; T/Sgt. Victor P. Donahue, Omaha, Neb.; Sgt. William J. Drout, Evanston, Ill.; Cpl. Thomas C. Dunn, Belford, N. J.; Cpl. Paul R. Ellsworth, DeKalb, Ill.; S/Sgt. John Fabion, Chicago, Ill.; Cpl. Henry Jaeger, Denville, N. J.; T/Sgt. Harry A. Jackson, Pitchfork, Wyo.; Cpl. Roland G. James, Wynnewood, Pa.; S/Sgt. Sherman C. Loudermilk, Abilene, Texas; Lt. H. H. Laidman, Grand Island, N.Y.; Cpl. Arthur T. McCann, Jr., Richmond, Calif.; S/Sgt. John R. McDermott, Glendale, Calif.; Pfc. Harry F. Tepker, Westwood, Cincinnati, Ohio; Cpl. James Wayne Seese, Fort Pierce, Florida; T/Sgt. Elmer Wexler, Bridgeport, Conn.; Sgt. Edward A. Wronski, Chicago, Ill.; Capt. Alexander G. Raymond, Stamford, Conn.; Pfc. Richard T. Wolff, Detroit, Mich.; and a Japanese prisoner of war.